

portugal:



jeremy boulthbee

Colonies and Colonizers

"A Martlet special report"

By Jeremy Boulthbee

Special to the Martlet

Anyone who claims to be interested in the broad subject: "Africa Today"--or better "The Problems of Africa Today"--cannot hope to tackle the subject without taking a thorough look at the machinations of Portugal and the Portuguese colonies in Africa.

And by the same token, one can't hope to understand the workings of the colonies without understanding the minds of the colonizers.

Far too little attention has been paid to the Portuguese. There is, after all, little point in trying to put a salamander in a cage or a rampaging water buffalo into a goldfish bowl. It is necessary, first, to have at least a modicum of understanding of the nature of the beast...

The Portuguese are a complex people. It isn't possible to lump them into the category "colonizers," and leave it at that.

If this article can start even a handful of students on their way to a library to look up "Portugal"--to read about the history of this magnificent people, or better yet, to venture into their country to find out what really makes them tick, then something worthwhile will have been achieved.

North Americans, you see, usually view themselves as experts on every subject that exists. But they are notoriously ignorant of the Latin mind--witness the misadventures of the Americans in South America--and they are even more ignorant of the goings-on in "Happy, Happy Africa." (For years Robert Roark was considered the originator of the most knowledgeable stuff in print!)

Well, Roark is dead and Africa is awakening lickety-split. And Portugal is almost unheard of and totally under-rated...

Background

In no country in Europe is the toning-down of Asian hostilities noted and dwelt upon quite as it is in Portugal.

Suddenly the active declaimers in centres such as London, Paris and Rome have little to parade about--unless it is on account of more local issues. The United States may still be an international Bad Guy, but people are not quite so sure why anymore.

But the air is different in Lisbon. It is widely anticipated by everybody from taxi drivers and doormen to captains of industry and government sooth-sayers that because South-East Asian hostilities have simmered down the attention of the world is now to be focused on the only other western nation at war.

With such focus, it is reasoned, will come also such cartloads of bile and invective that the tiny nation will have to re-double its defences, expound its pathetic position more forcefully than ever before in order to retain what national dignity is left to it.

The ego-busting truth is that the western world, caught up in its own giant machineries, is not about to give much more than a nod and something less than a tinker's dam about tiny Portugal and her African problems.

It is sad when the waging of a war goes more or less unnoticed for 12 years.

It is sadder that an unconcerned world proceeds blithely about its business, saying little about such a war, and knowing even less about what little is said.

And it seems saddest of all that a little would-be "western power" goes so pathetically unrecognized as such by her bigger brothers--who are really so very much bigger that they reinforce the national inferiority complex which is the keystone of Portugal's continuing war in Africa.

There are several reasons for examining the complexity of the Portuguese circle. Among the most obvious, the correction if possible of a wealth of misinformation, and the study of a microcosm of problems and agonies very much the concern of the entire western world.

Just what is Portugal, and where is it?

Stuck on the western backside of Spain, Portugal has frequently been treated as just another province of its larger neighbour. Over centuries this, and the facts of the country's geographical and economic position, has made of the present 9,000,000 Metropolitan Portuguese a nation that has historically turned its back on Europe.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, when the great powers were bickering then as they do now over Europe, Portugal found itself unable to compete in its geographical entity--and in any case, certainly a junior among bickerers. Instead, the Portuguese went to sea and subsequently discovered and colonized an empire abroad.

Today Portugal is the world's last--and thus largest--and most far-flung "empire." Numerically, Portuguese ranks sixth in the list of world languages.

At home in Europe Portugal is a poor nation, dependent still on fishing, wine and cork as the major export items. Other industries are developing fast, but not fast enough to sustain a little country that blows 42 per cent of its national budget on maintaining its overseas territories intact.

(Another large means of income is the money sent home each month to parents and relatives by Portuguese workers who have found it next to impossible to make a decent crust at home. A million of these exiles are to be found in Germany, France and Britain.)

Abroad, Angola and Mozambique are two of Africa's wealthiest territories. If, as the Portuguese government claims, these two huge areas are indeed an "integral part of the fatherland," then Portugal as a totality is certainly not a "poor" nation--but one of the world's richest and fastest-developing.

Such is the enigma of Portugal.

In Lisbon, the streets go untended, the buildings fall into disrepair and decay through lack of decent maintenance and paint. There is an air of exhaustion about the old place, a mustiness that reeks of poverty, and hardship.

Yet some of Europe's wealthiest families live here; the Portuguese escudo is the world's most stable currency; the country's new industries are growing rapidly with increased foreign investment; the tourist industry, riding on the coattails of Spain's big boom, holds almost unlimited promise for the country's hotel and resort operators.

Walking through Portugal talking to the Portuguese, one very definitely gathers the feeling--and quickly--that an overcritical and jaundiced world has long misjudged this corner of Europe, or at best confused it with something Spanish. For Portugal is neither east nor west, left as we generally understand left, nor right as we generally understand right. It is a third world stubbornly separate, composed of the same essential ingredients that have somehow caught alight in Brazil and pushed that country to the edge of world prominence. It is easy enough to see the great differences between Brazil and the rest of Spanish-speaking America. By the same token, it is a mistake to compare too closely Portugal and Spain--though it is a common western error to talk of the two in the same breath.

"We're not Europeans," goes an oft-stated Portuguese slogan, "but white African living on the edge of Europe."

The statement is almost literally true. Settled 800 years ago by European warrior princes coming in from Galician Spain, Portugal became for centuries a battleground between invaders and Moorish colonizers. In time, the Moslems were beaten back into Africa or absorbed; but then came Portugal's Age of Discoveries and a massive influx of slaves. In the 17th century the country had a population of 3,000,000. Of these, 600,000 were black slaves from the Cape Verde Islands who were either exported to Brazil or absorbed into the local population. Over centuries, the inter-breeding of invaders, Moor and black African has made of the Portuguese a race as different from their Spanish neighbours as the Indian from the Eskimo.

Portuguese proud

The Portuguese today are isolated and proud. They are stubborn, dedicated, hard-working, intensely serious-minded, and they have the most astonishing power of endurance. Honesty is not a trait the tourist is likely to notice, but it is nonetheless a national characteristic which permits the Portuguese not only to speak his mind with almost blunt forthrightness, but to question closely every viewpoint he considers important. After more than 40 years of suppressive press censorship, the Portuguese have developed a knack for seeking information and finding answers. A foreigner coming into close contact with Portuguese will find himself being asked more questions than he would think to ask himself. It is a mixture of curiosity and that ever-present national inferiority complex.

This inferiority complex is not a small thing to contend with, and it confuses many foreigners who feel the Portuguese are simply bloody-minded. In fact, the error is most often the foreigner's for failing to take into account that a proud man never

willingly allows himself to be passed over or ignored--and the Portuguese consider themselves to have been ignored by the world at large for a long time. A man who has the temerity to suggest perhaps the Portuguese have ignored the world around them may be cut down with an icy historical reminder: "Nonsense! We discovered it!"

Expatriates living in and around Lisbon in any of the well-to-do coastal resort towns are often guilty of harsh judgement of the Portuguese--and if there is more than a grain of truth in what is commonly noted (among foreigners who seldom take the trouble to learn their host language), it is also true these same expatriates use their own limited yardsticks to measure one of the most deep-seated and rigid culture patterns in Europe today, and that few outsiders are either tolerant enough or patient enough to give more than a cursory examination.

What does somebody on-the-spot pick to notice about Portugal?

Recently, a senior newsman who has been covering Portuguese affairs for several years commented that "the lack of education" is the biggest single problem facing the country. Illiteracy, he said, is still as high as 31 per cent--a figure he was careful to point out he had arrived at through the several sources open to him.

"He is using the figures of a decade ago," contradicted a government spokesman. "Our illiterate now are only the old and unteachable."

the Portuguese mind

But the newsman had also said: "The problem appears to be that there is a memory factor. The student has to be very well schooled indeed not to forget what he has learned as an adult once he re-integrates into the isolation of Portuguese rural life."

He went on to talk about what he called the country's high incidence of "national stupidity"--his own catch-all term used to describe "a plateau of supreme incompetence that exists at a high management level and becomes proportionately worse the higher you go."

He related how, on the day recently when the escudo was re-evaluated, he contacted the editor of the financial newspaper "Journal do Comercio" five hours after the fact--only to discover the man had heard nothing about the move.

"Can you imagine the editor of The Wall Street Journal not knowing about a dollar re-evaluation five hours after it had happened?" he asked.

Such a tendency is not entirely unrecognized by the Portuguese. Like the British, they have a sense of humour that very often pokes fun at themselves, and there is one joke going the rounds of Lisbon that sums up life in Portugal with three F's and three P's.

FUTBOL--the country's national sport.

FADO--a style of folk-song lament typical in central and southern Portugal.

FATIME--the town where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared, and thus an oblique reference to the country's Roman Catholic zest.

POLICIA--a political barb.

PUTAS--prostitutes.

PENA--a word which means punishment, grief or sorrow, and which indirectly embraces emotions the Portuguese seem to know well.

In a very real sense these general headings seem to sum up a large portion of those things most often on the minds of the average Portuguese.

Somehow church and state are separated more than in other Roman Catholic countries, and although religion has obviously formed the character of these people one is aware of it only distantly. For some

reason, one's contact with the people is mostly through the menfolk--who do not seem to talk a great deal about their church-going habits. At the same time, it is the womenfolk one seems to see most often entering and leaving the churches.

There are, however, terrifying stories of children in church schools being taught their spelling and arithmetic by the age-old threat of heaven, hell and purgatory issued by priests and nuns whose teaching ability and sense of psychological know-how are most definitely questionable.

Certainly such a wretched system can have a crippling effect on the minds of thousands of Portuguese school children who, in a very significant way, are placed in bondage for the rest of their lives. (Minimum schooling was recently raised from four to eight years.)

On the other hand, Portugal has always kept remarkably free of the Vatican and the whole line of popes since the 12th century when the reigning king established the current practice of appointing bishops in Lisbon.

A promise of some much-needed church enlightenment has been introduced with the appointment of Antonio Ribeiro to the College of Cardinals. Forty-seven years old, Ribeiro is one of the youngest appointees, and a noted liberal thinker. The hopes of many Portuguese are riding on this one man to use his considerable influence on the state through the medium of the church. He has yet to be tested--and there are many sceptics who doubt that even a man of Ribeiro's skill can be as forceful as necessary to effect liberal change upon a most conservative regime.

Any look at Portugal would not be complete without a look also at what might be termed the Portuguese ego-image--especially in terms of sexual behaviour.

"Latin love" is famous. It is difficult and dangerous to talk in generalities, but there are traits, usually as a result of education and cultural environment, which do stand out over others.

The closest counterpart to prevailing present day attitudes might best be likened to Edwardian England. Men are the bread-winners, heads of households, and thus privileged; women "know their place," organize the home--and in all respects act as subsidiary beings assisting their mates preen. Women's Lib is virtually unheard of. If a man has the means, he almost invariably has affairs outside his marriage, and tells his wife otherwise. Although the wife may guess, she seldom asks, and remains eternally, and sublimely, outside it all--although she is not beyond taking a discreet lover of her own--the difference being that she won't talk about it to anyone, while her husband most certainly will discuss it with his men friends. The man has learned that his wife can be remarkably possessive and jealous, so takes care to hide his actions from her. He, in turn, could become dangerously jealous of his wife's infidelity--and furthermore the law is on his side should he decide to do anything about it.

sexual behavior

A man will seldom marry a girl who is not a virgin, and yet he will concentrate much of his energies trying to conquer a girl whom he knows to be one.

The woman, even today will seldom obtain full sexual satisfaction from her man. For the man, it is sufficient to conquer; for the woman, to "perform her duty."

A doctor, who had completed a medical study of just this phenomenon, told this writer: "A man actually finds it distasteful for his woman to achieve sexual climax. He doesn't think much of her, mistrusts her if she appears to enjoy sex too much."

The so-called Portuguese "attitude of men to women" actually appears to be not unlike similar attitudes in Spain, Italy, Greece, and, to a lesser extent, France. Attitudes do appear to be changing and consequently a whole new set of social standards are coming into play, which in turn appear to be giving rise to numerous social doubts and anxieties inherent in the contemporary Portuguese image of themselves.

It is a country where the rich are incredibly rich and the poor equally incredibly poor.

For example, though municipal government is trying hard to better the lot of the city's poor, the fringes of Lisbon are dotted with clapboard houses (manufactured, literally, of scraps of wood, old sign hoardings and cardboard) with mud floors and the stench of filth and rotting food and waste that brings rats in their thousands.

Within a few hundred meters of just a community, lives one of southern Portugal's wealthiest families, in a town palace that has belonged to them for centuries. Theirs is exquisite taste and gracefulness, their home filled with ancient and beautiful heirlooms, their conversation world-wide in scope and depth. The lady of the house complains that servants are hard to come by these days, and her young husband, worried over business affairs that take him on globe-girdling trips, relaxes with his horses during lunch hour. He is a polished and magnificent horseman, and there can be few men who sympathize and understand animals as he does.

The sidewalks of Lisbon's main thoroughfares are fastidiously mosaicked in black and white stones--a feature to be found in the main towns of all the Portuguese-speaking world. Architecture, ancient and modern, is imaginative, individualistic as the people, grand. There are fountains, monuments and statues in abundance, towers and gateways, palaces, tombs and castles, all speaking of the rightness of the history and tradition that go back to the days of Portugal's grandeur in the 15th century.

a country of passion

It is a country of passion--and not a little theatrical, at that.

One sees it in the people, like in Sameiro the day she returned from the hairdressers with far too much colouring smeared on her lips. She did not care, but laughed and said: "So you think I am pretty?"--and her brown eyes became deeper and deeper.

There was passion, too, the day she decided to scream in the car, by way of a new exercise in self-expression and, losing control, screamed so loudly she even embarrassed herself.

There was passion in Renato when he talked of horses, or women, and in the way he walked, talked and laughed. He would tell stories of his boyhood with Jose at Azinhaga in the Ribatejo, and his voice would almost crack as he told of horse-running across the Spanish frontier with the gypsies. His talk on other occasions was of kings and battles, and the ancient history of his country. And in his tiny wife there was more dynamism and power-pack, it seemed, than in a squad of Israeli women commandos.

"Life is difficult," said a girl called Margarida, whose husband had fought with the air force in Guinea.

"Angola and Mozambique--we must fight. Why? Because they are ours!"

And there was a passion, and a sadness, the day little Isobel Silva hung her head and shyly admitted that, yes, her father was far too strict with her.

"And now he never gives me money, because two years ago I once went out without his permission."

Sometimes--particularly to the guady-shirted North American tourist--it is all a little heavy and incomprehensible.

But criticize it, if you dare, in front of even a most liberal and progressive-minded man, and he may cut you short tersely:

"Excuse me. My name is Antonio. I am Portuguese!"

Politics--Economics

The sun filtered through the canopy of green eucalyptus, catching patches of light and dark in the roadway that wound up the mountain side. On top, the turrets and ramparts of the fairyland palace of the Portuguese kings at Sintra broke the skyline.

"I would love to live here," said the wife of the driver of the car. "I have come here since my childhood, and I never get tired of this beautiful place."

Her husband, in raucous good humour, replied: "To live in a house like that, it would be necessary to have a regiment of servants. And for you, my dear, they would have to be a regiment of castrated niggers at that."

It was not intended as an offensive remark. It was meant in good humour, and it was accepted as such. There is a class of Portuguese nobility that would not think twice about calling a castle a house, and for whom the words servant and nigger are simply words, and nothing more.

"If there is a political threat in this country," a close observer of the Portuguese scene told this writer, "it is from the right not the left. (Prime Minister Marcello) Caetano is a shred and clever man. He knows he must toe the line. If he doesn't, there is a very real chance of a rightist takeover--a combination of the military, like the colonels in Greece, and the country's rich industrialists."

There are many opportunities to discuss politics in Portugal, but it is not always a wise thing to do. The political wing of the Portuguese police is efficient, autocratic and ruthless. In addition, they are not particularly noted, even in Portugal, for their individual intelligence--and such men can be downright dangerous to cross. Stories of police brutality abound, as do stories of the brutal and harsh treatment meted out through the political courts. Communists and trade unionists are outlawed, and a socialist, or even a relatively vociferous liberal are apt to be termed "communists." There is a certain paranoia attached to the idea.

Last year there was a story going the rounds about a beautiful girl in her twenties, a student on campus at the University of Lisbon, who was sent into solitary confinement for 11 months--in a cell in which the water came to her knees. When freed, she was a permanent cripple, and will remain the rest of her days in a wheelchair. There were other stories of students being battered and beaten by police, and one instance of police opening fire on students at the ancient Coimbra University.

These stories are far too numerous to ignore altogether, and the idea that anything of the kind can happening keeps many people on their toes and worried. But as far as this reporter's efforts were concerned, trying to collect details and verify stories heard from several different sources was virtually impossible. There are just too many avenues of official information that can be closed off to an enquiring newsman, and so far the most part such stories must remain in that unsatisfactory realm of foggy fringe information.

Portugal is a dictatorship with a difference. There are elections, and elected representatives are not

entirely powerless--although by far the largest portion of them follow the same political line, conveniently, as government. In Spain, political oppositionists have their say and, when too far out of line, do their time behind bars or in exile. In Portugal, one rarely hears they exist. The press, all forms of communication, are strictly censored. When, last year, six rather courageous opposition deputies resigned from the government en masse, it had little effect, and they rather sadly became the butt of after-dinner jokes.

Portugal was ruled for 40 years by a university professor, Doctor Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, with arch-conservatism and rigid discipline. Salazar was an incredibly strong man who yanked his beloved country out of decades of bloody revolutions--and then forced them to sit down and be quiet. When he died five years ago, all Portugal wept--but so did everybody begin to ask "What have we accomplished after 40 years under Salazar?"

He was replaced by liberal-thinking Doctor Marcello Caetano, also a much respected university professor. The story goes that Caetano, government appointed rector at the University of Lisbon for years, walked out of his office for good the day his assistant came in with his head bloodied after police had bullied their way through a throng of angry students, and swung their clubs at whoever passed by.

Yet for all his liberalism, the man certainly knows his limits. Occasionally there are indications he like to move on a liberal line much farther than he is doing--as was the case when he declared an edict freeing the press. (This particular one was immediately stamped on: the press is free, but in the interests of national security at a time of emergency, censorship remains. Nothing, in fact, has changed.)

"It must be realized that stepping in to fill the gap left by a very strong and well loved man is not an easy task," says government information chief Doctor Pedro Feytor Pinto.

Portugal, he says, has a "weight of history" to wrestle with--not a small part of which is that this most backward little country in all Europe, that somehow missed the industrial revolution and has always denied or defied Europe, is nonetheless a fact Europe.

For centuries, Portugal's industries have been almost exclusively wine, cork and fish.

Adjustment to an industrial footing requires not only the genius of the captains of industry, says Doctor Feytor Pinto, but close attention to "the mentality of the people, and their preparation for their future role."

Government in Portugal, he said, is showing continual enlightenment--but not at the same rate as the people.

"There is, noticeable, a gap widening between the needs and minds of the Portuguese and the government's ability" to furnish the necessary. The machinery of government is slow moving, he said, but is "constantly battling to close the gap."

two-headed monster

The constitution of Portugal delegates almost equal powers to two men--the prime minister, and the president. The prime minister is appointed by the president, but the president himself is elected by a body of deputies and ministers largely on the advice of the prime minister. The two men complement and check each other, and it is virtually impossible for one to act without the other's knowledge and approval.

President Americo Tomas, aged 80, was recently re-elected to his fourth seven-year term--which could very possibly mean that he will die in office. If he does, the constitution allows that his place be taken by

Caetano will get to choose the next prime minister.

Already Portugal is nosed into a coming industrial boom. Foreign investment, particularly American, German and French, is increasing rapidly each year, and the reins on home borrowing have been slackened right down to allow more Portuguese a share in materials and goods.

It is a two-headed monster, for at the same time as allowing Portugal to step tremulously into the 20th century, it gives those who already have a greater opportunity to take more--and probably far more than either they need or is necessarily good for their country.

One has the distinct impression now--and it is a hideous thing to see--that much of the development going on is nothing short of pure greed and opportunism.

It is widely conceded, even by extreme rightists who would far rather not concede it, that one of these days Portugal will have to abandon its stance in Africa. As a result, the rush is on to get in there quick and grab as much as possible before the gates close.

In an unguarded moment, an oil executive with huge interests in Angolan speculation (financed incidentally, by the United States) actually said to this writer: "The oil reserves (in Angola) will last another 30 years; that will put me at 66, by which time I'll be all right--and that's all that matters to me... Money is life; money is blood."

economic progress

On yet another occasion, the same man jokingly said: "The only way to solve our problems in Africa is to take all that nigger rubbish, and to take a machine-gun and to kill them all...."

Coming from a man of his position and power, it was a frightening joke.

But taking a broad look at some other areas of industry; Portugal's textiles are considered to be first-rate, and the industry as a whole to be one of the most progressive in Europe.

Factories for manufacturing goods--everything from shoes to railway carriages--are being established in many different parts of the country (but particularly in the Lisbon area), and the products are fast-moving onto a competitive scale in the world's export markets.

Hydro-electric power is being developed rapidly on the south of the country; a steel mill that started barely 10 years ago is now working full capacity on the south bank of the River Tagus; minerals are being dug from the ground in beefed-up mining programmes near the Spanish frontier; there is a rapidly growing chemical industry; and tourism, despite increased costs of living, hit a record high last year and is expected to go higher this coming season.

Anticipating a would boom in giant oil tanker traffic, the ship-building firm of Lisnave has completed the world's largest dry dock--over a kilometer in length, and capable of taking a vessel up to 1,000,000 tons in size (when somebody gets around to building it). It is already proving itself to be a sound investment; Lisbon is now one of the major ports for all tanker traffic travelling the Mediterranean and Atlantic routes.

Credit for this burst of activity must undoubtedly be laid at the feet of Caetano and Tomas--the two men who embody government in Portugal.

At the same time as trying to maintain a rigid control over the masses of the people, government has moved ahead in an experiment to create economic and material mobility.

It is an experiment that must work, say observers, for if it does not, the army could well step in.

Questioned on both the achievements and the potential hazards facing his country, Doctor Feytor Pinto is notably non-committal. "The president and the prime minister are well aware of the dangers facing us," he says.

Is Portugal's military a substantial (or even a competent) threat?

The answer, without doubt, is yes -- though it is hard to make a more specific assessment.

There was a time when Portugal's army was the laughing stock of Europe, a rag-tag band of unwilling, poorly-equipped and generally rather demoralized soldiers who really had had little fighting practice of late.

But suddenly it is no longer a laughing matter. Portugal's army today -- largely on account of the wars in Africa, and a constant political uneasiness at home -- is sizeable, tough, well-trained and well-equipped. In addition, both the air force and navy are modern and lethal arms, and there is a fourth force of para-military police which is possibly tougher than any one of the others, and is constantly ready for trouble at home.

Yet somewhere in the background of everyone's mind is the knowledge that, before Salazar, Portugal's history until modern times has been dotted with some of the bloodiest revolutions imaginable.

One is jolted into taking notice when a sober-minded critic of Portuguese life comments undramatically: "We will not escape a revolution in Portugal -- and when there is a revolution, we will not escape bloodshed. There has to be a revolution, and there has to be bloodshed. There are too many fanatics in this country -- on both sides, right and left -- and they are all ready to spill blood. When they do, it will be the people in the middle who catch the worst of it."

Anybody can make a guess as to what comes next in this forgotten little country, but a fairly intelligent one, it would seem, would be linked rather closely to that gap between the government and the people that Feytor Pinto was talking about.

Self-View

It is difficult to squat outside oneself and look upon one's own position with perspective; and it is difficult to review someone else's stance with impartiality -- there are certain people for whom one would simply never do it -- mostly because of ignorance; sometimes only because the idea never occurs.

This sort of situation has come into play in the case of Portugal as a nation among a community of nations. While the political leaders in Lisbon may well have been guilty of failing to look upon themselves and their country with sufficient perspective, it is nonetheless true that the rest of the world has failed to examine closely enough exactly what does constitute this little country -- in terms of its history, influence, power and potential. It is a big mistake to think only of Spain when considering "Iberia."

So what is it that sets the Portuguese apart from other people? What is it, exactly, that makes them worthy of separate and individual study?

Answering those questions risks presumptuousness; and yet they are important questions in light of contemporary events. There are many opinions, and in setting forth what facts are known this writer cannot help but include certain assessments. It is done consciously not in order to gain prominence for its own sake, but to make known certain criteria that could easily be missed by another or less sympathetic critic.

Historically, then, Portugal's greatest power has always manifested itself outside the boundaries of the country. Portugal's national energies have consistently been directed outwards -- in contrast to the grandeur of the Spanish in Spain. If there were celebrations in Lisbon's streets in the 15th or 16th centuries, like as not it was because of what had been achieved overseas, rather than what had been achieved or acquired at home through colonial exploitation of the overseas territories. This difficult and subtle point of difference is widely misunderstood in the west -- and particularly by western press.

accusations invalid

This is not to deny that there has been, and may yet be, considerable colonial exploitation on the part of Portugal. But it should be understood that at no time in history has Portugal ever attempted to use its colonial empire for furthering its interests as a European power. Indeed, one can go further (and here one should consider the point that the Portuguese do not consider themselves Europeans, but "white Africans"): at no time in history has Portugal attempted to establish its supremacy in anything in Europe; the attempt to establish as a Great European Power was never embarked upon at all. With eyes constantly on Africa and the tropics, Portugal is an exception in that it has never had designs on any part of Europe outside its own frontiers.

Manifestly, accusations of power-seeking or prestige-building at home in Europe through the retention of colonies in Africa are not only a recent occurrence but an invalid one.

Certainly it suits the western mind to recognize in Portugal those motives possessed by itself when Africa was so brutally divided. But the legitimate answer is elsewhere.

Portugal has been deserving of criticism, and it has been voiced sufficiently that this writer need not repeat it. Perhaps it is time to examine some of those basic Portuguese quirks that have been instrumental in committing the Lisbon administration absolutely to the continued presence of Portugal in Africa.

Firstly, there are economic factors. As outlined previously, Portugal has enormous financial interests -- principally in Angola and Mozambique -- and only the most naive would expect wholesale withdrawal when there are such large prizes to be gained by remaining. It may not be moral, but it is the system by which a capitalist country exists -- a point which raises issue beyond the scope of this article. In a sense, the economic factors pertaining are obvious, and they can be argued; but there are other

more subtle reasons for Portugal's determination to remain in Africa -- and they are possibly of greater significance in that they are basic to the Portuguese character and temperament itself.

The first, then, is pride -- a word the North American clearly defines to himself in terms totally at odds with those of the Portuguese. For one thing, we seldom take the word seriously at all, and if we do it is to condemn pride as being too self-indulgent.

A Portuguese, on the other hand, enjoys his sense of pride. To him, pride is an honourable emotion and certain personal traits, attitudes and views go hand-in-hand with it, and are thus unquestioned. A man may strut, or glower, wave his hands, cast insults or praise, turn his back and walk from a room, or weep -- and if it is a matter of pride, his action is not only acceptable and normal, but often barely noted at all.

If one tells a North American he is proud, chances are he will either feel ridiculous or insulted -- and perhaps both.

On the other hand, if one says the same thing to a Portuguese, he will probably feel complimented, and he will take pleasure (and possibly pride) from being so openly praised.

A Portuguese is proud to be a Portuguese, and he is proud of the history and traditions of his country. Even the Portuguese military exiles in France or England, while professing shame in the political activities of their homeland, speak clearly of the pride each has in Portugal, and their wish one day to be free to return.

A man called Sousa, who made his name as a great military musician and whose ancestors emigrated to America, is spoken of with pride in Portugal. He was Portuguese, say the Portuguese, before he was American.

won't forfeit territories

The greatest of all Portuguese colonies, Brazil, broke away from the fatherland in the 19th century, but it has not prevented the Portuguese from feeling a deep sense of pride in the achievements of their kin. Brazilian music, literature, poetry, is an important and integral part of the cultural background of a metropolitan Portuguese. He identifies closely.

For years after the Indians overpowered the tiny enclaves of Goa, Damao, and Diu on the coast of the sub-continent, Portuguese erected signs in Lisbon which read "Goa is ours!" And when it became clear that it was no longer, Goans were met with more than passing sympathy in Lisbon. To this day, Portuguese maps show Goa as a part of the empire, and there is an awkward silence if anyone should dare to suggest otherwise.

Portugal is proud of its place in Africa. An area neglected for centuries, the Portuguese have nonetheless sunk new and considerable effort into territories they do not intend to give up. And they are proud of their more recent achievements. While it is lamentably true that a disproportionate percentage of the economy goes to Portugal's war effort, it is also true that Angola and Mozambique are now receiving more attention to development and up-grading of facilities than any other territories in Africa. There are those who quarrel that the Portuguese have ulterior motives in building roads, schools, communications networks, hospitals and medical centres in the territories. The fact that it comes only after African pressure has been applied makes it look as though that pressure was necessary before anything would be done. This may be the case, and it is a simple matter to castigate. The fact stands, though, that Portugal has woken to the realities of these territories finally striking out on their own, and has still not pulled back from installing these necessary items and facilities -- which in themselves would represent a colossal financial loss at the moment of independence. And, in a further sense, this represents an effort at providing the necessary for people who will require it in any event -- whether the colonizers stay or go. In a very real sense, the Portuguese are attempting to benefit the territories, and they should not be condemned for this.

Said one government employee: "If we are to leave after all this, let us at least leave knowing we have made a fuller contribution to the welfare of the people in these lands than any other colonizer in Africa."

This leads to what might be termed the "Portuguese mission" in Africa -- a very real concept to both pro- and anti-government thinkers.

For years, the Portuguese have felt the stinging criticism of a sceptical western world that has wasted little time in pandering to what it has generally considered the typical Latin inefficiency of Portugal as a colonizing power. So scathing has been this criticism, coupled with outright ridicule, that the

stubborn and enduring qualities of the Portuguese, along with a not inconsiderable feeling of inferiority, has assisted the Lisbon administration to dig in all the more forcefully (and with general public approval), determined to handle its own problems in its own way.

While in terms of national pride this may well be an admirable quality, it is nonetheless frustrating because of the incredible breakdown in chain of command between Lisbon and the outposts. Portugal has found it most difficult indeed to control its own problems. Latin inefficiency, it seems, lives ever on -- and positively thrives in the tropic colonial zones.

However, the administration in Lisbon is determined to continue its programme of "civilizing" Africa -- and to do this, there has been a concentrated effort to resettle an otherwise peasant class from the fatherland among the tribespeople in the African territories. Over the years, this has had an astonishing effect. Apart from there now being a large white population in the territories, there is also a large mulatto population.

The program is by no means new -- although it has been accelerated in the last decade -- and the result of it is that there is now a new class of "Portuguese" who are truly part of the land in which they live, and relate culturally almost exclusively to Portugal. Quite simply, in America when a white and black mix, the resultant offspring is considered "black." The Portuguese have a different slant: if there is a mixture of black and white, the result is considered Portuguese. It is a sort of reverse form of bigotry, but does not appear to be quite as brutal a form of it as the outright antagonism shown blacks and Cape Coloureds by the Rhodesian and South African governments.

In Portugal, racism is nowhere spelled out on paper. (For instance, it is very difficult to assess the numbers of the white, black and mulatto populations of the colonies; records according to racial origin are not kept, and so one has to tackle the problem, if one wishes, by assessing immigration and birth figures. It is difficult to arrive at an accurate figure.) Racism does exist on a man-to-man level, as it does anywhere in the world. But in fairness, it should be made clear that the Lisbon administration, as well as local colonial governments, have worked hard to discourage it, and abolish it at all levels. These efforts have not been entirely successful -- largely because of communication breakdowns between those who make the laws and those who see to their enforcement. But the groundwork is there; the effort has been made, and it is beginning to pay off.

monster problem

The Portuguese administrators feel this: they have inherited a monster of a problem, as did Britain, France and Belgium before them. Where those other colonizers slid from under their problems with 20th century dexterity, leaving chaos behind, Portugal has chosen not to do so. Portugal has hung on in order to preside over a smoother transition from colony to nation than took place in Nigeria, Chad, Zaire, or a dozen other new African states.

"There is a large gap between black and white in Africa," a journalist once explained. "We feel that Portugal could usefully close that gap."

The political necessity of the colonies is a rather more obscure quantity.

Portugal itself is ruled by a wealthy elite and, as has been previously pointed out, its position is far from secure. There can be little doubt that if the government in Lisbon steps down on the issue of the status of the colonies, it is going to be faced with a huge crisis at home. Would this elite be capable of facing down a growing middle class in Metropolitan Portugal if they can be faced down by the rag-tag

guerrilla groups operating in Africa? It is quite openly a question of confidence -- and now a question of whether there is enough time to salvage a nation that has sustained such a shattering series of setbacks.

Prime Minister Marcello Caetano is essentially a liberal man, whose major task at the moment is to contain the power of the right at the same time as appeasing the growing left. That he is, in the circumstances, one of the world's more adroit politicians is beyond question. He and his entire administration are playing for time. If he succeeds, Portugal will become the wise and all-knowing godfather of a new Africa; if not, the reality of a right-wing military-backed junta (such as that presently in power in Greece) is immensely close.

colonial sense of trust

Throughout its 800 years of history, Portugal has maintained the closest possible links with the entire Portuguese-speaking world. This, also, is a point of pride -- and it is an interesting note to all that they may say about themselves that the Portuguese culture is one of the most homogeneous of the western world. Even Spain's once-great empire has not hung together culturally as cohesively as Portugal's. Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Cuba -- all have broken ties completely with their founding country, and now only the language remains in common. In the Portuguese colonies, the local inhabitants cling fiercely to their Portuguese identity -- and have done so for centuries. Their culture and their focus centres in Lisbon today in exactly the same way that it did in the 14th century.

And, more remarkably, Portugal and its former great colony, Brazil, still maintain a cultural

proximity unlike Spain's with the Spanish-speaking nations. The difference most noticeable is that where once the flow had been Portugal-Brazil, it is now much more Brazil-Portugal. The closeness, the regard and sense of trust that appears to exist between the two nations is difficult for the Anglo-Saxon mind to assess or comprehend. But it is there -- a constant flow at all levels; sports, music and the arts, literature, the sciences, and politics.

"we sired a giant"

Talking of Brazil, and indirectly of the Portuguese Empire, a student once summed up his feelings like this:

"We sired a giant. We know who we are. When it was necessary to set out to look for answers to the greatest questions facing mankind, we did so with courage and faith -- and we have endured as a people. The English may talk of their American cousins; we Portuguese talk of our Brazilian brothers."

With many mistakes, for which criticism might justly be levelled, the Portuguese have made astonishing progress in finding solutions to some of their problems. Likewise, they do not appear to be backing away from those enormous problems facing the world at large -- problems relating to basic human rights and needs, embodying the finest aspirations of man attempting to live and work with his fellow man.

One great problem facing the western nations, it seems, is that they really have failed to note the degree of Portuguese success in relation to the degree of Portuguese failure.

